Social Media Policy & Planning Workgroup : Blogging and Typepad Toolkit

This page last changed on Nov 18, 2009 by jessweiss.

Blogging / Typepad Toolkit

Blogs. You've heard the term on the news, and you've seen the links in emails and online. Colleagues and pundits repeatedly say how easy they are to implement. Some Agencies and Secretariats are already blogging. Your supervisor said a blog is THE key to your communications strategy, and she needs one NOW. Or maybe she just said that you need to blog because everyone else is. You want to get into the blogging game.

While technical ease of use is one of the hallmarks of blogs, it is not the most important. Here are a few pages with tools and tips to help make your blog a success.

Preliminary steps:

Identify your audience

Why are you blogging? Who are you trying to reach?

Do you want to speak to members of the public

ie: TSA blog - goal is to communicate with the public, improve understanding of agency goals, react to public concerns, and improve public perception. Articles about traveling with pies at the holidays, traveling with musical instruments, etc. Addresses real traveler concerns in a light, informal but informative manner.

Do you want to speak to others in your industry?

ie: Terms & Conditions - Insurance Industry Blog - goal is to communicate with professionals in the insurance industry about issues that may affect them as professionals. Focus is on industry news. Because the audience is industry specific, writing can be more targeted and reference terms of art.

Identify If/How a Blog Will Help You Meet Your Business Goals

Benefits of a blog are:

1. Nimble publication without HTML and CSS coding. This publication method can allow rapid, frequent publication without technical headaches.
2. Ability to solicit and respond to comments. This conversation building results in greater civic engagement and transparency for your agency.
3. Additional avenues to present information. Blogs allow you to reach a wider and different audience than press releases to the traditional media. This ability to communicate without filters provides public access to information that might otherwise be unlearned.
4. Ability to use more effective media types. Blogs provide you with a platform for using different media types, such as videos, images, and more casual forms of written communication. This allows you to be creative in crafting your communications in the most effective way.

Identify your content:

1. How often will you post?
   Posting must be scheduled for at least one time per week. 2-3 times per week is preferable. It is difficult to create trust with an audience without posting frequently.
2. About what will you post?
   You need to choose topics that are of interest to your audience. Why would they want to read your blog? What makes you stand out? How will writing about these topics aide your agency in fulfilling its mission?
3. Prepare a schedule for authors and publication

Preparing this schedule ahead of time will ease maintenance of your blog, and ensure better post quality and quantity.

Identify your administration plan

1. Who will administer comments?
   a. Comments must not be allowed to "go-live" without moderator approval. This is for both security purposes and to prevent violation of the comment policy.
   b. Comment moderation must occur at least one time per business day. It is hard to create trust with an audience without frequent posting of and responding to comments
2. Some comment moderation tips:
   a. Make sure you review the comment policy to ensure that you understand what is and is not permissable.
   b. Comments that are critical must still be published, unless they violate one of the stated content prohibitions in the comment policy.
   c. Comment link spam - Typepad specific
      i. The comments in our Typepad blogs are text only, per security requirements. However, people can include links in their signature on the blog.
      ii. Rather than eliminate the opportunity to include links in signatures (they may have value, ie: link to the Massachusetts Audubon Society on the environment blog), we recommend that moderators review these links to ensure that they are not spam or linking back to a virus embedded on a page. If you are unsure, please delete the included link, do not open the link! Simply delete the included url. You may still publish the comment without the link.
3. Who will ensure downloading of content for public archives?
   a. Public blogs are crawled by the Mass.gov Archive-It subscription. However, it will not crawl any unpublished comments, which need to be maintained for public records purposes. Therefore, it is recommended that all blog contents are exported and saved locally in case unpublished comments are needed.

Mandatory policy requirements

1. Review and customization of [blog comment policy](#) by Secretariat or Agency council. Comment policy must be posted on the blog. (Linked in final version)
2. Review and customization of [website terms of use and privacy policies](#) by Secretariat or Agency council to reflect blog existence and use. These policies must be linked to on the blog. (Linked in final version)
3. Employee policies - writing as a representative of the agency versus writing as an individual. Questions regarding communication of these policies due to union contracts. (Linked in final version)
4. Ensure that all content posted on your blog complies with enterprise accessibility standards. This includes alt tags for images and closed captioning for video.

Security considerations

1. Any comments must be moderated and must be "plain text"
   Any comments posted to the site must be approved by you and stored without any formatting (aka "markup"). This will mitigate the risk of an attacker posting malicious comments or comments that would reflect negatively on you or the Commonwealth.
2. Any postings must be approved by an Administrator
   Any posts by your staff should be approved by the site administrator. This will prevent a malicious attacker or a disgruntled employee from posting unapproved material to the site.
3. Any staff accounts must use a strong password.
   By using strong passwords, the risk of an attacker guessing or "brute forcing" a password is reduced. ITD recommends that passwords should be at least 8 characters long, contain both upper and lower case characters, a number, and a non-alphanumeric character. This password must not be in use anywhere else.
4. Backups must be taken and stored on-site.
   Backups should be taken and stored by you or your staff. This allows the quick restoration of data in the event of a compromise or accidental deletion of data on the site.

Best practices for blogging

1. <u>Be conversational</u>. It is very important to write in a friendly and informal manner. People who read blogs do not respond well to what sounds like another press release, jargon or "biz-speak". Nevertheless, your writing should also be well crafted. Don't mistake casual for careless.
2. <u>Be responsive</u>. If people post comments or questions on your blog, you should address them when possible. You might answer individual comments directly, or, if you receive many comments on a particular topic, you could blog about the issue.
3. <u>Be timely</u>. Do not wait too long to respond to a comment. People will assume that you are ignoring them, which will hurt your credibility with your audience.
4. <u>Be relevant</u>. Is there an issue that is in the news? Respond to it with your blog!
5. <u>Be efficient</u>. Is it possible to naturally include keywords in your blog posts? If so, do! This will help with search engine optimization, which will drive traffic to your blog.
6. <u>Be proactive</u>. Make sure you promote your blog. Issue a press release upon launch. Link to your blog from your homepage. Include it in your formal communications plans. Insert it into your email signatures. Creating multiple paths to your blog will help you form a reader base.
7. <u>Be realistic</u>. Blogging well takes time and effort. You need to plan to devote time and resources to making your blog a success. Additionally, building an audience may take longer than anticipated. Don't let slower than hoped for results diminish your commitment.
8. <u>Be social</u>. Link to blogs and content authors who write about "your" topic in your posts. Respond to blog posts on other blogs that are relevant. Tweet your posts. Find other social media avenues to further the discussion.

Commonwealth Conversations blogs:

Mass.gov and the Governor's office have worked to implement an enterprise blogging program, known as Commonwealth Conversations. Currently, there are six active blogs in this program. We have budgeted to start another six during fiscal year 2010.

Why become a member of the Commonwealth Conversations Community?

1. Use of Typepad enterprise class blogging software. Less expensive due to bulk purchasing
2. Enhanced / expedited availability of Typepad customer service due to enterprise subscription
3. Experienced support from Mass.gov team who specialize in administration of Typepad blogs and blog best practices. This includes assignment of an official domain name, ie: publichealth.blog.state.ma.us.
4. Your blog will have a greater sense of trustworthiness since it will share branding with other Commonwealth Conversations blogs, and brading related to Mass.gov.

How to become a member of the Commonwealth Conversations Community

1. Write up a proposal which includes the named preliminary steps. (See the checklist that follows).
2. Submit said written proposal to agency PAB member.
3. If the PAB member approves the blog proposal, they will submit the request to the Governor's Office and Mass.gov for further review.
4. Approval, if granted, is communicated to PAB, Mass.gov and the Governor's office by email.
5. Mass.gov creates and customizes Typepad blog platform
6. Mass.gov trains agency authors on use of Typepad blog platform

Additional Blogging Guidance/Resources

1. Webcontent.gov on blogs
2. Commoncraft - Blogs in Plain English
3. EPA Blogging Guidelines

Blog preparation checklist

1. Who is your audience?
2. What business goals can your blog to help you meet?
3. What topics will you blog about?
4. How will you administer your blog?
5. What is your publication plan / schedule?

6. What changes do you need to make to the template privacy and comment policies? What changes do you need made to your website terms of use?
7. How will you publicize your blog?